

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Thundridge Church of England Primary School

Ermine Street, Thundridge, Ware, SG12 0SY

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Satisfactory
Diocese	St Albans
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Date of inspection	23 March 2018
Date of last inspection	14 March 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Controlled 117408
Headteachers	Paula Greatrex and Ann Gaze
Inspector's name and number	Lindsay Fraser 107

School context

Thundridge is a smaller than average primary school with 84 pupils Nursery to Year 6. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and disabilities is above the national average. The percentage for whom the school receives extra funding due to social disadvantage is well below the national average. The headteacher, who was in post at the time of the previous inspection, now shares the headship. The school has seen recent instability in both staffing and governance and currently there is a vacancy for the parish rector.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness Thundridge VC Primary School as a Church of England school are satisfactory

- The headteachers have overcome significant challenges to ensure the continuity of the school's Christian ethos in terms of providing for the emotional and learning needs of every pupil, resulting in progress at least in line with national expectations.
- High quality relationships throughout the school community based on the school's Christian ethos and the responsibility given to older pupils enable all pupils to feel secure and to thrive.
- The Christian ethos, underpinning the developing reflective practices throughout the school, is having a positive impact on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Whilst governors and school leaders recognise the school as a church school and describe the school values as Christian values this is implicit rather than explicit. As a result, they are unable to evaluate the impact of the school's Christian character on standards of achievement and well-being.

Areas to improve

- Develop and agree a Christian vision which can underpin all aspects of provision and can be communicated to all stakeholders so there is a shared understanding of the school's Christian character and purpose.
- Develop the knowledge and skills of the governing body relating to the school's Christian character in order that they can fully engage with the monitoring and evaluation of the school as a church school and its impact on all pupils.
- Ensure that the school values are explicitly Christian, as well as being shared values, so that pupils can make links confidently with Christ's teaching and Bible stories.
- Ensure that collective worship is planned to include a clear focus on Christian beliefs and concepts so that pupils have a greater understanding of Anglican worship and worship of other denominations.

The school, its distinctive Christian character, is good at meeting the needs of all learners

The Christian character of this small village school is expressed in strong, caring and nurturing relationships. The passionate commitment of the two headteachers, based on a shared Christian understanding, to meeting the needs of every pupil is shared by all staff. This has enabled the school to quickly overcome the recent challenges of staff changes. A wide range of values, articulated by many as Christian values, underpin all approaches to pupils' academic and personal development. Forgiveness is seen as a key Christian value which has underpinned the school's ability to emerge from its challenges and to create an atmosphere in which all pupils can feel safe and secure. Pupils can describe values which impact upon their relationships with others and upon their approaches to learning. This is because a new value is introduced at the beginning of every week, each one underpinned by a biblical text and discussed in relation to pupils' own lives. Pupils realise that these values are not exclusively Christian. Due to the wide range of values, pupils cannot always refer to their meaning in depth or their biblical links. The school acknowledges that fewer values covered each term is likely to have a deeper impact. Behaviour is good and pupils know that any issues will be dealt with quickly and effectively. When dealing with behaviour some members of staff are beginning to discuss with pupils the question of what Jesus would do. Pupils make good progress academically. This is because staff ensure that each child's needs are known and addressed. Consequently, appropriate, effective and creative approaches are taken to ensure pupils' well-being is paramount, enabling them to access the curriculum and wider school activities. In addition, pupils are given the tools through a range of strategies such as 'mindfulness' and 'growth mindset' as effective ways of boosting confidence and self-belief. Strenuous efforts, based on Christian love and responsibility, are made to encourage good attendance, whilst demonstrating sensitivity towards those with medical needs. The Christian character contributes to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) which is good. This is because the school ensures that a broad and engaging curriculum is in a place and that pupils have access to a wide range of extra-curricular activities. In addition, the school has developed reflection areas in all classrooms, the entrance foyer and the room used for before and after school care provision. Pupils speak enthusiastically about their participation in creating these areas and how the use of artefacts enables them to pray, to reflect upon a range of issues and to feel calm. Many pupils write their own prayers. A prayer tree displaying thank-you prayers indicates that prayer is important to many pupils. To further develop confidence and responsibility a buddy system is in place for older pupils to pair with the youngest with whom they meet weekly for shared activities, including the writing of prayers. These prayers are displayed and used in worship enabling buddies to experience a shared ownership and contribution to worship. Strong relationships based on love, trust and responsibility develop, many of which extend beyond the school day with discernible rewards. Pupil voice holds a strong place within the school with the recommendations of the council swiftly acted upon. For example, prayers have been reintroduced at the beginning of lunchtime following the request made by the children's council. Older pupils understand Christianity as a worldwide faith because this is an aspect of religious education (RE) lessons. RE enhances the Christian character because there is an emphasis on pupils relating all concepts to their own lives and experiences. During the inspection pupils were able to think deeply about a range of concepts related to differences within themselves and differences between faiths. Pupils are clearly respectful of differences and enjoy learning about different cultures and faiths. Their interest and understanding are good because of the engaging experiences used in lessons. For example, pupils were able to describe to their parents the meaning of Diwali because they had each made and taken home a clay pot known as a diya. However, opportunities to gain first hand experiences, through visits and visitors are limited.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory

Collective worship is recognised as important by most pupils, staff and parents and there is some evidence that worship is having an impact on pupils' personal development. For example, some parents refer to collective worship having helped their children in times of bereavement and pupils beginning to ask questions of a deeper nature. At present collective worship is often referred to as 'assembly' which is limiting pupils' recognition of it as an act of Christian worship. There is clear and cohesive planning in place for collective worship according to the value of the week and the half termly theme. This enables all staff to deliver collective worship with confidence. However, the headteacher responsible for collective worship, is firmly committed to improving the quality of worship. Because of recent training she has identified that, although some Bible stories are used in worship, there is a need to be more explicit in linking the school values to the biblical context. Pupils know and can explain a few stories from the Bible, but currently the use of distinctive features of the Anglican tradition is underdeveloped. However, responses such as 'May God be with you' are now being used. Pupils have some understanding of Christian beliefs about Jesus, such as 'he gave his life for others' and 'he put others before himself'. However, their understanding of God as three in one is less developed. Pupils have a good understanding of the main festivals in the church year because they all participate in these festivals. Pupils' spiritual development is well supported through the use of prayer in collective worship. Pupils all know the Lord's prayer and many pupils have an age appropriate understanding of what each part

means. The use of pupils' own prayers on a weekly basis is enabling pupils to understand the relevance of prayer in their own lives. Despite the current vacancy for a new rector, members of church still support the school in a variety of ways. The school continues to use the church for all main festivals and these are well attended and appreciated by parents and members of the local community. Pupils very much enjoy participating in acts of worship and there is an opportunity for older pupils to plan and deliver worship on a regular basis. Pupils behave well and with respect. They enjoy singing and on the day of the inspection they showed good understanding of the words in the song they were singing. Space to hold worship is severely limited and the school is beginning to seek creative alternatives to enable the school community to gather together in a more worshipful atmosphere. Monitoring of the impact of collective worship has only recently been introduced. Governors are now involved in this process. The school has rightly identified the need to involve leaders of other denominations to broaden pupils' understanding of Christian worship.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is satisfactory

Whilst the Christian ethos and values have been recognised as important to the school a clear Christian vision underpinning this has not been fully developed. The chair of governors is aware of the need to review, agree and articulate a vision with the whole school community for the future of the school as a church school. Together with the headteacher responsible for collective worship, he has therefore accessed training to further develop the school's Christian character. Currently, governors and senior staff adhere to the mission statement of 'Do Your Best to Be Your Best' and set this within a Christian ethos. Resulting from the considerable changes within the governing body, governors are gaining confidence in their ability to work with the headteachers to ensure standards of achievement and wellbeing are high. They are rigorous in the monitoring of standards and progress within the school as well as provision for those in need of extra support. As a result, they have ensured that staffing and the curriculum are now appropriate to the needs of the pupils. Monitoring of the distinctiveness and effectiveness of the school's Christian character is in its early stages. However, it is clear from self-evaluation documents that governors and headteachers are committed to developing stronger links with the diocese so that staff and pupils will benefit from further professional development and support. The subject leader for RE has been well supported in her training for the implementation of a new RE curriculum. However, further opportunities for developing the teaching of Christianity have not yet been accessed by the school. The governors' commitment to succession planning and effective leadership has led to a joint headship. The promotion of the assistant headteacher to a headteacher role for 20% of the school week has enabled both headteachers to give strong leadership. This has led to improvements in teaching and learning and the well-being of the whole school community because of the attention given to staff training. The school is beginning to work with other church schools and adopt good practice where appropriate. In the absence of a vicar, the governor responsible for RE is now involved in delivering and supporting collective worship. Services in the church continue to take place in the absence of the parish rector and the choir is invited to sing at the main church Christmas Carol service. A very active parent committee supports the school well through fund-raising and providing events which enhance the community ethos of the school.

SIAMS report March 2018 Thundridge Voluntary Controlled Church of England Primary School, Ware, SG12 0SY